

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 8411

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, PGOV, NI, XA, CG
SUBJECT: ZAIRIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NIGERIA

REF: STATE 208244

1. THE GOZ'S PERCEPTIONS OF NIGERIA ARE COLORED BY RIVALRY FOR AFRICAN LEADERSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO HEAVYWEIGHTS AND THE DISCOMFORTING RECOGNITION THAT ZAIRE'S INFLUENCE HAS SOMEWHAT DECLINED SINCE 1973 WHILE NIGERIA'S HAS INCREASED. OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE AND COLONIAL HERITAGE, AS WELL AS PRESENT STATE OF THEIR RESPECTIVE ECONOMIES.

2. ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS RAISED REFTEL FOLLOW:

A. THE PRESENT NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT: RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO STATES DETERIORATED DURING THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR, WHEN NIGERIA BACKED THE MPLA AGAINST THE GOZ-SUPPORTED FORCES OF FNLA AND UNITA. RELATIONS IMPROVED (WITH SOME HELP FROM US AS INTERMEDIARY) DURING 1976, CULMINATING IN MOBUTU'S VISIT TO LAGOS DURING FESTAC. ACCORDING TO SOURCES HERE, MOBUTU WAS PLEASED WITH HIS TALKS WITH OBSANJO AT THAT TIME, AS WAS FOREIGN MINISTER NGUZA WITH HIS CONTACTS WITH GARBA. THESE CONTACTS PAVED WAY FOR POSITIVE
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RESPONSE TO GOZ'S APPEAL TO NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO SERVE AS INTERMEDIARY WITH ANGOLANS DURING SHABA INVASION. OBSANJO'S APPARENT SYMPATHIES FOR ZAIRE DURING THIS CRISIS SERVED TO ALLAY FURTHER MOBUTU'S SUSPICIONS RE NIGERIA'S POLITICAL ORIENTATION. WHILE ZAIRE'S CURRENT RELATIONS WITH GON ARE CERTAINLY NOT AS CLOSE AS THOSE WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER, MAINLY FRANCOPHONE REGIMES, THEY ARE MUCH MORE CORDIAL THAN DURING

ANGOLAN WAR DAYS--A CORDIALITY THAT PRESUMABLY WILL BE EXTENDED WITH OBSANJO'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO KINSHASA.

B. NIGERIA'S ROLE IN AFRICA: MOBUTU VIEWS NIGERIA AS A POWER TO BE RECKONED WITH IN AFRICA--ONE THAT HAS MORE POTENTIAL TO HELP OR HURT ZAIRE'S INTERESTS THAN MANY OTHER STATES. THIS ACCOUNTS FOR MOBUTU'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH OBSANJO'S REGIME. IN DOING SO, HE PROBABLY SEEKS TO ENCOURAGE OBSANJO TO GIVE MORE SUPPORT TO THE MODERATES' CAUSE IN AFRICA AND, BY VIRTUE OF NIGERIA'S RELATIONS WITH SUCH LEADERS AS NYERERE AND NETO, TO EXERCISE A MODERATING INFLUENCE ON PROGRESSIVE REGIMES WHICH MOBUTU VIEWS AS ADVERSARIES. WHILE IN THIS CONTEXT MOBUTU MIGHT WELCOME AN INCREASED NIGERIAN ROLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, TOO MUCH PROMINENCE WOULD PROBABLY PRICK MOBUTU'S EXISTING SENSITIVITY AND RESENTMENT AT NOT BEING INCLUDED AMONG THE FRONT LINE STATES.

C. NIGERIA AS A SPOKESMAN FOR AFRICA: IN LINE WITH ITS VEILED UNEASINESS AT NIGERIA'S GROWING INFLUENCE, ZAIRE WOULD PROBABLY NOT WELCOME ATTEMPTS BY NIGERIA TO ACT AS SPOKESMAN FOR AFRICA. AT A MINIMUM, ZAIRE WILL VIE WITH NIGERIA FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE FRANCOPHONE STATES.
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